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Newsweek's photos of execution doubted

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The credibility of photos published in Newsweek purporting to show members of the Nicaraguan resistance killing a Sandinista spy by slitting his throat was questioned yesterday by a number of administration officials and a spokesman for the resistance.

The Newsweek photos were cited by Sen. Tom Harkin, D-Iowa, whose sympathies for the Sandinistas are well known, during yesterday's debate over President Reagan's proposed \$14 million to fund the resistance groups.

"The pictures show graphically the same kind of thing I saw in Vietnam," said Sen. Harkin, a Vietnam veteran, in arguing against funding the resistance groups.

The Newsweek story states that the man who was killed was a Sandinista spy who had been caught "reporting rebel locations and informing on civilians who sold food to the Contras."

Bosco Matamorros, spokesman for the Nicaraguan Democratic Force, the largest of the resistance groups, said the guerrillas no longer wear the light blue uniforms shown in the graphic Newsweek photos.

Mr. Matamorros and Pentagon officials also questioned how people living in the jungle could have such clean uniforms.

In the photos, the man who is killed is shown digging his own grave. A man identified in the story as a "Contra" is shown in the next two photos cutting the man's throat with a knife, and another is shown holding a knife over the man's abdomen as he lay in the grave. None of the clothing in the pictures appears to be dirty.

"How can these men have their pants so clean while they are on patrol?" Mr. Matamorros asked.

In addition, he said it is unusual for soldiers in the jungle to be on patrol without canteens on their belts.

One Pentagon official told The Washington Times the uniforms in the photos are too clean and the footwear in too good condition for members of the Nicaraguan resistance.

Most resistance fighters are barefooted, the official said. He also said that in the sequence of pictures, the killer changed hand positions, which he said is not normal for someone to do when a stabbing takes place.

The official also questioned how the victim's clothing could be so clean after he had dug his own grave and why a grave would be necessary if, as the Newsweek story states, the Sandinista troops were nearby.

The official questioned why, if the resistance wanted its atrocity hidden, it would allow the photos to be taken in the first place and then let them be released.

Another defense intelligence analyst said there does not appear to be enough blood in the photo for someone who has had his throat cut.

The photos were taken by Frank Wohl, 21, who is identified in the Newsweek story as a "conservative activist from Northwestern University" who "had been traveling with the Contras as a noncombatant for nearly four months."

The Washington Times repeatedly tried to reach Mr. Wohl at his residence in Evanston, Ill. On one occasion, Mr. Wohl answered the phone and told the reporter he was on a long-distance call and to call him back in a few minutes.

The reporter called back several minutes later but could get no answer.

Marc Fisher, president of the College Republicans at the Evanston campus, said he knew Mr. Wohl and that Mr. Wohl had gone to Nicaragua and had spent several months with the Nicaraguan resistance.

Asked if Mr. Wohl was a supporter of the resistance, Mr. Fisher said: "He is a very strong supporter of the Contras." Mr. Fisher said he had seen the Newsweek photos and was puzzled about why Mr. Wohl released the photos when Mr. Wohl had been supportive of the resistance.

In the Newsweek story, Mr. Wohl states he had been "traveling with the Contras as a noncombatant for nearly four months."

The story further states: "The rebels, [Mr. Wohl] argued, had to kill or abandon their prisoner, since guerrillas on the run cannot maintain POW camps. The executioners used a knife instead of shooting their victim because Sandinistas were patrolling the neighboring mountain," Newsweek stated.